

Box Hill Historical Society Newsletter



Volume 23, Issue 3

June 2017

General Meetings of the BHHS in February to May and September to November are held on the 3rd Thursday of each month, beginning at 8 pm in the Strabane Chapel Hall 29 Strabane Avenue, Mont Albert North. In the winter months—June, July and August—meetings are held in Meeting Room 1 of Box Hill Library, 1040 Whitehorse Road, beginning at 2 pm.

Members and friends are always welcome.
Enquiries:

03 9285 4808

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For your diary

Details of the next meeting of the Society are as follows:

Please note the change of day, time and venue for the winter months. The general meetings for June, July and August will be held on Sunday afternoons from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm at Box Hill Library, 1040 Whitehorse Road, Meeting Room 1, 1st Floor (accessible by lift or stairs).

Sunday, 16 June 2017

Guest speakers: **Glenys Grant OAM and Kay Edwards – 'From Burwood Boy's Home to Bestchance; 120 years'.**

The Burwood Boys' Home was founded and built by Robert Campbell Edwards in 1895. When girls were admitted in 1972 the name of the home was changed to Burwood Children's Home. Following government social welfare policy changes whereby many children could be supported in their own or foster homes, the Burwood Children's Home closed in 1986. With a new location the organisation became Child and Family Care Network and is now known as Bestchance Family Care.

(For details relating to the other events confirmed to date for this year, and other forthcoming events, see page 3.)

Founded in 1963, the Box Hill Historical Society is affiliated with the

- * Royal Historical Society of Victoria
- * Association of Eastern Historical Societies

and is a

Place of Secondary Deposit for the Public Record Office of Victoria

The Society can now be found on the Web at:

www.boxhillhistoricalsociety.com.au

(or use a search engine)

and you can now email us at:

boxhillhistory@gmail.com

Follow us on Facebook at

www.facebook.com/boxhillhistoricalsociety

President's report — June 2017

Our Society has seen gains and losses since the previous Newsletter. On the debit side we have lost a current member and two former members through death, in the past month. Phyllis, the widow of former President Keith O'Reilly, and herself an active member, and Bruce McKenzie both passed away recently. Our greatest loss is in the passing of Graeme Reynolds—our resident cartographer. Tributes to these three individuals will be found below, in this Newsletter.

On a positive note, the Society has successfully updated its presence online, with the 'live' launch of its new website. Those members with computer capability should check out the Society's new site. In doing so, you will be doing the Society a favour by adding to the 'hits' that have been made on the site, and thus increasing its visibility to search engines such as Google, Mozilla Firefox or Yahoo.

In an effort to increase the usefulness and reach of our records, the Secretary has started compiling a new digital index. The focus of this exercise is the Society's collection of newspaper scrapbooks. There are more than 30 of these books, containing 1000s of articles cut from newspapers of the period 1947 to 1993. The aim is to lodge the digital database on our website, with a view to making it available to a wider audience who will be prepared to purchase copies of the indexed articles. To date the first six books have been indexed, yielding about c.3000 entries, which have been uploaded; further entries will be added progressively.

Gary Presland
President

Association of Eastern Historical Societies

The general meeting was held on 29 April and hosted by Waverley Historical Society in their rooms on the 1st level of the Waverley Library.

Whilst 20 people were present eight were from Waverley HS. Societies represented were Box Hill, Knox, Lilydale, Mooroolbark, Mt Evelyn, Ringwood, Sherbrooke/Foothills, Upper Yarra Ranges, Waverley and Whitehorse. Our society was represented by Janet Galley OAM and Peter Galley.

Details were given of the AEHS bi-annual conference, to be held in Ringwood on 24 June from 9.15 am. to 4.00 pm. Details of speakers, etc. can be obtained from our Society's Secretary if you are interested in attending. The cost is \$40 per person and is being heavily subsidised by the Association.

It appears there is to be continued funding for TROVE.

The Royal Historical Society of Victoria (RHSV) has been a beneficiary from the estate of the late Doug Gunn (a member of the Upper Yarra Ranges HS; as well as an RHSV member; and a former Vice President of AEHS).

Waverley members served a delicious afternoon tea and this enabled those present to look around their rooms and see some displays.

The guest speakers were Ray Price and Philip Johnston who spoke on the early history of Waverley, when it was known as Mulgrave. The talk was fully illustrated and mainly concentrated on the High Street Road area.

The next general meeting of AEHS, which will incorporate the Annual General Meeting, is on 9 September, and will be hosted by Sherbrooke/Foothills HS.

Janet Galley OAM

Suggestions?

The Committee welcomes suggestions from members for events to be held by the Box Hill Historical Society.

If you have any ideas for topics for talks or speakers, tours, or exhibition topics, please contact a member of the Committee.

Contributions?

A newsletter like this one functions best and is of most use and interest to members when it contains a wide range of pertinent information for its readers. To assist this exercise, the Editor is always looking for contributions about the Society, from our own members. If you have something you would like to include in an issue of the Newsletter—a photograph, some information you'd like to share—don't be shy; contact the Editor.

Mission Statement

The Box Hill Historical Society seeks to collect, preserve, facilitate access, research and communicate items that reflect life in and the development of Box Hill and district.

Geographical area of interest

The Collection is relevant to the suburbs of Box Hill, Box Hill North, Box Hill South, Mont Albert, Mont Albert North, Bennettswood and the parts of Burwood and Surrey Hills, which fall within the City of Whitehorse.

Forthcoming Society events

Please note the change of day, time and venue for the winter months. The general meetings for June, July and August will be held on Sunday afternoons from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm at Box Hill Library, 1040 Whitehorse Road, in Meeting Room 1, 1st Floor (accessible by lift or stairs).

Sunday, 16 July 2017:

'Film clips from the archives'

The Society has a number of short film clips showing scenes and events from earlier times in Box Hill. A selection will be shown at this meeting.

Sunday, 20 August 2017:

Annual General Meeting

Guest Speaker: Anna Burke MP, former Speaker of the House .

2017 Annual General Meeting

Notice is hereby given that the 53rd Annual General Meeting of the Box Hill Historical Society Inc. will be held on **Sunday, 20 August 2016**, beginning at 2 p.m., in the Box Hill Library meeting room, 1022 Whitehorse Road, Box Hill.

Business will include -

- Acceptance of Minutes of 2016 AGM;
- Annual Reports 2017;
- Financial Statements;
- Election of office bearers, committee members, and the Audit Committee;
- Any other business of which written notice has been received.

A nomination form for office bearers and committee is enclosed with this newsletter. Please give consideration to nominating for the committee of the society.

Helen Harris OAM

Hon. Secretary

Electronic copy of the Newsletter

Members are reminded that this Newsletter can be received in digital form, as an attachment to an email. When received in this way rather than through surface mail, the Society benefits by reducing the cost of both producing and posting the Newsletter. In addition, less paper will be used, which of course is good for the environment.

If you are interested in having your Newsletter mailed electronically, please send an email to that effect, addressed to the Editor at presland.gary@gmail.com.

Alternatively you can email the Society at
boxhillhistory@gmail.com



Recent speakers

Society member and volunteer **Grace Swiney** spoke to the **April general meeting** about her 'Life in England during WWII'. When war broke out in September 1939 Grace was nearly six years old and living in Farncombe near Guildford in Surrey. Her father was a fireman working shifts on the Southern Rail that passed through the town, and her mother was a cook at the local school. She remembered listening to Churchill on the wireless, then people came with gas masks and they had to do drills on how to wear them. There were regular air raid drills to the shelter in the school grounds: at home the shelter was a cupboard under the stairs, and there was a rarely if ever used underground shelter built in the park. Her father made covers for all the windows that were fitted at night: Air Raid Wardens checked on residents, visible lights and movement of people during air raids. Food, water, clothing and linen were rationed, with ration books for some items. Sweets were rarely seen but her father was allowed extra cheese as a railway fireman. On Friday nights her father would heat the bath water — 5" were allowed for each person with another 5" for her father and mother in turn. Her father maintained a very good vegetable garden as well as berry bushes: berries were eaten fresh or made into jam. Medicines included a daily dose of cod liver oil and malt. They also kept chickens, raised roosters for special dinners, and kept rabbits, some of which were eaten or traded with the butcher. Evacuee children would come to the street and be allocated to households by a local committee – many preferred to host girls. Grace's mother's two sisters lived with them and a cousin Betty who attended the local school with Grace. Fireworks weren't allowed outside on Guy Fawkes' Day so her Aunt May lit some inside. Her aunts were good seamstresses and worked for a neighbour lining fur coats (the daughter had a white fur coat).

A grandfather lived in London; his family had to sleep in the cellar: the children (Grace's aunts) came to visit on weekends and went by bicycle to dances in Guildford. Her father continued as a fireman during the war because it was an essential service: he worked 8 hour (or longer) shifts and rode his bike each day to the engine terminus at Guildford – the Southern Line operated between London – Victoria and Portsmouth. The postal and telegram services continued, although telegrams were nearly always bad news. Grace couldn't remember her mother ever being distressed during the war: her family were fortunate living in the Surrey countryside. Her father took her out one evening to see the red glow in the sky — London burning. There were no bombs apart from the 'buzz bombs' towards the end of the war – when you heard them you would wait to hear the explosion. On a visit to Wonthaggi the coal mine siren was a reminder of the air raid sirens during the war. She once saw a Spitfire shoot down a German fighter, then do a victory roll. As the tide of the war turned in Europe there were regular waves of bombers flying overhead towards Europe in the evening and returning early morning. When the war ended things took a while to change, there was still rationing, but they were able to visit London relatives and see the bomb sites. Her father was promoted to engine driver and her aunts married their returning soldier fiancés in wedding dresses made of parachute silk. The beach at Eastbourne was fenced off with barbed wire but there was still the ice cream man on his bicycle. The greengrocer had bananas (which she didn't recognise) but sweets took a while to return.

Her family were fortunate that all survived the war, including Uncle George who was at Dunkirk, but the uncles died relatively young. At family gatherings the uncles never told of their horrific experiences, except once when cousin Betty overheard a conversation with her father. Cousin Betty wrote recently to Grace with a postcard marking the 100th birthday of Dame Vera Lynn.

The talk concluded with some questions and comments from the audience. One member recalled a deep underground shelter in Brunel Street, East Malvern. Grace recalled that they had few toys, apart from some dolls, marbles and skipping ropes, and on holidays would put mats down in the nettle patch and play there. She still has a war time 'utility blanket' and a George VI Coronation mug.

Alan Ritter, school archivist and 'retired' teacher, presented a pictorial journey through **100 years of Mont Albert State School No. 3943**. The development of Mont Albert and its environs followed the extension of the rail line through Box Hill to Lilydale in 1882, although it was slowed by the land crash of the 1890s. Pressure for new schools had been growing since before the Great War so that by 1916 a school was promised if over 100 supporting signatures could be obtained. More than 200 people signed the petition and after the purchase of a 'large' plot of land and construction, the three storey brick building opened in Barloa Road under head teacher Charles Hyland in April 1917. There were three staff and 149 pupils in seven classrooms. Parents soon raised £120 to provide school equipment. The school became a Central School, adding grades 7 and 8, in 1919 and in 1920 Alfred Harley became Head Teacher, a position he held for 17 years: amongst his achievements was an extensive tree planting program – a 1945 aerial view shows the row of mature cypresses along the Barloa Road frontage. Classes were large in the early days with an infant class of 90 and typical class sizes of 60 to 75 pupils. As a central school, graduating students were

Recent speakers (cont.)

eligible for scholarships, and many went on to further secondary and university education.

The head teacher used to address school assemblies from the first floor verandah, where the view to Doncaster to the north would have been of open fields and orchards. A house sports system was in place in 1926 and rounders were being played – the Gaythorpe memorial cup from this period commemorates a pupil who died as the result of an accident on his way home. In 1932 unemployment was high so not all the girls could afford to bring their own materials for sewing classes. During the 1930s there was a polio outbreak so many children stayed away from school. During WWII children knitted scarves for the Australian Comforts Fund, and zig zag air raid shelter trenches were dug in the school grounds. The school choir won its section at the South Street Eisteddfod in 1946, a musical tradition that continued, to the present day, with Mrs Carrington and now her son Phillip. Free milk was begun in the 1950s, later that decade readers like *John and Betty* and *Playmates* were introduced and the school had an enrolment of over 900. The boys walked to the sloyd room at Box Hill State School in Station Street for woodwork class (where Ron Bansgrove taught until he became senior master at Koonung High School in 1965) and the tuck shop was in Grace Street. Lectures in Infant Hygiene were being held in 1958. In 1961 Lou Godfrey purchased a bell at auction from Pentridge Prison, which became the school bell. Grades 7 and 8 were absorbed into Koonung High School, which began on the Mont Albert site in 1964/65, and Mont Albert ceased to be a Central School. In 1972 pupils travelled around parts of the state on the 'Train of Knowledge'.

Local selection of school principals began in the 1980s and long serving Principal John Gow was appointed, serving from 1988 to 2009. The caretaker's cottage was relocated to Kinglake in 1995. The school fair raised \$50,000 in 1997 and parents funded the equipment for a computer room. In 1998 the old hall was demolished and the Grade 6 graduation concert held in Our Holy Redeemer School Hall in Surrey Hills: the new hall was opened in 2001. During the School's existence there have been several additions of classrooms and other facilities, the most recent being the Commonwealth supported Grade 5/6 classrooms in 2008.

Biographer **Carolyn Landon** spoke to the **March general meeting** about **Celia Rosser – Banksia Artist and the production of the Banksia Florilegium**. Landon was encouraged to visit and meet Celia Rosser at her gallery in Fish Creek (South Gippsland). The original idea was to record and publish some of Rosser's anecdotes, but on a subsequent visit, having been shown Volume I of the Banksia Florilegium and some early drawings done while in primary school and talking to Rosser the realisation developed that a more extensive memoir was warranted.

Celia Rosser had a difficult childhood: her father had a benign brain tumour that later caused further illness and his death before Celia finished school. His illness caused difficulties for Rosser at home and at school, causing her to take refuge in her art. She finished school at Grade 8: her mother wanted her to gain a skill (her father's money had run out) and she wanted to enrol her in a dressmaking course. Her older sister Ethel was empathetic and recognising her talent enrolled her at the age of 14 in the preliminary art course at the Melbourne Technical School (now RMIT) without their mother's knowledge. Although quite young she was allowed to sit, the exam, which she passed and chose to continue with fashion illustration. At one point she needed a text book to do life drawing, which her mother paid for, but disapproved of when she saw the content. Rosser went on to do fashion illustration for Myer's and at the age of 21 married Neil Rosser, who was training to be a secondary teacher. She 'retired' from work to become a housewife and mother, but continued to do drawing and design work at home. This created some tension as her husband had set ideas about the role of a housewife and the balance between her domestic duties and her art work.

While they were living in Orbost, where her husband began teaching, he brought home a greenhood orchid. Celia painted it and sold the painting to a neighbour: she became known as the 'orchid lady' and there were requests to do more. She became friends with Brenda Murray and went on car trips with her and their children: on one of these trips she saw a *Banksia serrata* and went on to paint a bouquet including the banksia for her friend Brenda, deciding then that she wanted to paint individual flowers. She did an Art History course by correspondence as CAE student then had an exhibition in Orbost. Her work was noticed and she was encouraged to apply to exhibit at the Leveson Street Gallery in Melbourne. Naturalist Norman Wakefield was invited to visit her at home to see her work but he was dismissive of it as just 'decorative'. However, the paintings she sent for exhibition all sold and Age art critic Bernard Smith was very complimentary. Carrick Chambers and John Turner from the University of Melbourne Botany School also recognised her talent. A representative of Jacaranda Press, having seen her paintings, engaged her to do the illustrations for the *Wildflowers of Victoria* handbook in conjunction with Government Botanist Jim Willis. Willis understood Rosser's background and gave her much advice about how to find and draw botanical specimens for this and subsequent projects.

Recent speakers (still cont.)

In the meantime Turner as chairman of the Maude Gibson Trust, after some months of deliberation with the Trust board, invited Rosser to paint the six endemic Victorian banksias, with the financial support of the Trust. The Maude Gibson Trust had been established in 1945 to support the scientific study of Australian plants, and hired painters to produce illustrations as part of this study. Turner also commissioned Rosser to do an illustration of *B. Serrata* for presentation to the Royal society, to mark the 200th anniversary of Cook's voyage to Australia with botanists Banks, Solander, Spöring and Parkinson. She was subsequently able to examine the banksia specimens collected by Banks and held at the Melbourne Herbarium.

Rosser also accepted an invitation to go back to work for an advertising agency. By this stage the family was back living in Melbourne and they had four young children. A little later she was encouraged to apply to work at the University of Melbourne but they declined to employ her, however, she was alerted to a Monash University advertisement for a science illustrator. They looked at her CV and employed her initially to do some general science illustration, then salt marsh grasses and mosses for the Botany Department. Privately she worked on some banksia illustrations, which ultimately lead to botanists George Scott and Martin Canny taking her to lunch and successfully proposing to Vice-Chancellor Louis Matheson the production of a true Banksia Florilegium. Alex George was engaged to write the text and international expert Professor William Stearn agreed to advise the project while George Scott acted as mentor and mediator. Volume I was published in 1982 and the project completed in about 2000 with Volume III. Amongst other recognition of her work there is now a *Banksia rosserae*.

William R Orange

Archivist's update

The Society's outing by train to the Footscray Historical Society was a great day out and it is always interesting to see how other Societies operate. Footscray HS is housed in a wonderful heritage building, a former bank, which the Society is fortunate to own. It is complete with a garden. Whilst the building is impressive it struck me and others as not particularly user friendly for storage and access to their collection and I came away thinking that the modern layout and facilities we enjoy in the Town Hall makes our work easier.

We miss Graeme Reynolds on Tuesdays. He was our longest serving Tuesday volunteer attending most weeks for around 20 years; that's quite a commitment to local history and our Society. He was a 'dot the i's and cross the t's' sort of person—traits always immensely valuable for archival and research work, but as well as that he was just a pleasure to work with.

Additions to the collection

The Acquisitions Committee met on Tuesday, 30 May and considered recent donations and a few items which have been in our Collection for a long time which included:

- Five boxes of material relating to the Box Hill Electricity Supply donated by John Wilkins, the former Chief Electrical Engineer for the City of Box Hill. John originally offered 22 boxes but we compromised with the five we thought most relevant to our archive, particularly as John has used the material to write a book, *Transforming Victoria 1894–1994, A century of Electricity Supply by Victoria's Local Government 1894-1994 and the State Electricity Commission of Victoria 1921-1994*. We have received an invitation to the book launch and hope to obtain a copy of John's book for our Collection;
- A book titled *From Burwood to bestchance, 120 Years of Care and Education*. This is a chronological history with images of the Burwood Boys' Home and now part of Bestchance Child Family Care organisation. Donated by the bestchance Heritage Committee which produced the book;
- A metal shoe horn engraved with 'Box Hill Bootery/Pattersons/Station Street/ Telephone Box Hill 305'. Donor unknown.

Robyn Doble
Hon. Archivist

Tributes to recently-deceased members

The Society was saddened recently to learn of the death of three locally active residents of Box Hill and former members of this Society. The following tributes has been provided by **William Orange**. The Society extends its condolences to the respective families.

Graeme Reynolds (24 May 1937 – 21 May 2017)

Farewell to our resident cartographer

When Graeme Reynolds was 'retired' from the PMG in 1992 at the age of 55 one of the things he did was to join the then Box Hill City Historical Society. For more than 20 years he came in each Tuesday, sitting at the high work table to repair, catalogue and store the society's map collection. Graeme was a meticulous and careful worker. He started with the MMBW sewerage plan maps dating from the 1920s and after completing those went on to other maps. More recently he had been updating City Engineer Charles Williams research on the origins of Box Hill's street names. When visited mid-May in hospital he apologized for not being able to complete this project, with about 19 names remaining to check in a total of over 750 names for the City of Box Hill.



In addition to the map and street name projects Graeme spoke formally to the Society about these projects and, in 2003, about his working life with the PMG. On occasion he spoke to community and school groups about the history of Box Hill and assisted as a cemetery tour guide. As publicity officer he helped prepare the library display that advertised the Society's monthly talk and in about 2001 he took on the role of hall keeper, picking up the task of setting up the Strabane Chapel Hall for the monthly talk from Keith and Phyl O'Reilly, a position he held until his death.

Graeme was born in the Queen Victoria Hospital and grew up in Auburn, where his father managed some tennis courts. He attended local schools and in 1953 he (and his brother Bruce) sat and passed the PMG Technicians' entrance exam and commenced work.

Graeme had a number of interests outside of work. He served as secretary and race recorder for the Hawthorn Cycling Club, where his brother Bruce was a competing member; and as a race official for the Albert Park Yacht Club. He belonged to the Box Hill City Theatre Company; and more recently to Box Hill North Probus; a camera club; and was still active in the Track and Trek Walking Club; an Investor Club; and attending Elgar Contact Residents' Group meetings.

When the writer visited him in hospital he was concerned that his hall key and street name research work made its way safely back to the Society. After periods of ill health during the past 18 months he died on 21 May, three days short of his 80th birthday.

Phyl O'Reilly (1930 to 6 April 2017)

Phyllis O'Reilly was an active member of the Society during the 1990s. She provided ready support for her husband Keith, who served as President from mid-1993 to 1996. Phyl was the supper co-ordinator at Society meetings, as well as assisting Keith with opening the hall and setting up for the meeting. They had married in 1950 and had three children. They moved into Strathdon nursing home in the mid-2000s, where Keith died in July 2011. Phyl was a member also of the Box Hill RSL, and remained active in the social activities of that Club. She died in early April, at the age of 86, survived by her children, as well as seven grandchildren and three great grandchildren.

Bruce McKenzie OAM (d. 30 May 2017)

A tribute to Bruce will be published in the next issue of this Newsletter.

Box Hill Historical Society Inc.
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Judith Eadon, Philip Widmer



**Box Hill Historical
Society
Newsletter**



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Box Hill Historical Society gratefully acknowledges the City of Whitehorse for its support with grants, discounts on hall hire, concessional use of premises in the Box Hill Town Hall and its willing assistance with our exhibitions in the Box Hill Town Hall Art Space.